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ABSTRACT

This bulletin, designed for Missouri local education agencies (LEAs), discusses the importance of using the law appropriately when implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act provisions for students with disabilities, and effective strategies for the implementation of positive behavioral supports. Educators are urged to use the following steps when a student demonstrates inappropriate behavior: formulate a collaborative team, define the behavior, identify the circumstances, determine the probable function of the behavior, and develop a hypothesis. Strategies for affecting the behavior are then provided, including: (1) changing the environment, such as providing a study carrel, seating students preferentially, and providing earphones; (2) increasing predictability by implementing a daily schedule, teaching transition behavior, and routinizing the unexpected; (3) implementing more choices; (4) adapting the curriculum; (5) providing more support, such as using peer tutoring and the PALS program; and (6) utilizing positive reinforcement. The differences between behavioral management and positive behavioral support are also explored. (CR)

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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BULLETIN

FROM THE MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION, DIVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

ISSUES IN EDUCATION

POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT: STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

NOVEMBER 1999

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Technical Assistance Bulletin

November 1999

from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Division of Special Education

Issues in EDUCATION

Please copy and route to your staff

Positive Behavioral Support: Strategies for Implementation

No one challenges the right of all children to safe and orderly schools. Everyone agrees that weapons, drugs, and violence cannot be tolerated in our schools. The reauthorization of IDEA 97 provided school officials with greater flexibility in disciplining students with disabilities while emphasizing a proactive approach and the use of positive behavioral interventions for those same students.

This edition of* Issues in Education *will discuss the importance of using the law appropriately when implementing IDEA 97 provisions for students with disabilities. It also will discuss effective strategies for the implementation of positive behavioral supports.

This* Issues in Education *will not address the disciplinary provisions in IDEA 97. For information about the legalities of discipline and students with disabilities, please access* Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Amendments of 1997 and Final Regulations *available on-line at: www.ideapractices.org/lawandregs.htm

Equal Treatment

Before a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) was mandated for students with disabilities, almost a million students were excluded entirely from public schools. Sometimes this exclusion was based on disciplinary action. Some students with disabilities did not attend school simply because they were judged too difficult to educate. Even today, school policies and practices exist regarding discipline for students with disabilities which are more restrictive than those for their nondisabled peers. Often, options available under the law are not utilized in an attempt to avoid the required processes and possible conflicts with parents.

At other times, speculative and subjective decisions by school officials lead to the exclusion of students with disabilities from educational programs. This can violate the rights of these students to a FAPE. Excluding students with problem behavior from instruction leads to widening the skills gap between these students and their classmates.

When decisions are made to avoid what the law allows and to follow a separate code of conduct for a specific group of students, a double standard is created. The belief that some students can "get away" with inappropriate behavior is reinforced by school personnel, students, and the public.

Administration may give the message, "my hands are tied." This leads to a backlash of public opinion against students with disabilities and the services they need for a successful life.

IDEA 97 does not exclude students with disabilities from discipline procedures. IDEA 97 does balance the need for safe schools for all children with the protection of the rights of children with disabilities to a free and appropriate public education. These protections do not prevent school officials from maintaining a school environment that is safe and conducive to learning for all children. Furthermore, the regulations for the implementation of IDEA contain a number of requirements for the use of positive behavioral supports in the

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provision of an appropriate education for children with disabilities. In this way, improved learning and safe environments are ensured for all students.

Positive Behavioral Support

Everyone behaves in ways that meet his or her needs. Challenging behaviors serve the same functions for some students as appropriate behaviors serve others. Although challenging behavior meets the immediate needs of some students, it interferes with their learning and the learning of others.

Positive behavioral support does not focus merely on changing the student and stopping the inappropriate behavior. Changing the systems, altering environments, teaching appropriate behavior or academic skills, and rewarding appropriate behavior are positive behavioral support strategies. The goal becomes to develop an understanding of the behavior's purpose, to teach the student new prosocial behavior and appropriate ways to make their feelings and needs known (Ruef, 1998).

- ✧ Positive behavioral support is neither a new commercial package, nor a new theory of behavior.
- ✧ Positive behavioral support focuses on creating and sustaining school environments that encourage appropriate conduct for all students.
- ✧ Positive behavioral support is part of an integrated approach which systematically utilizes procedures associated within the four systems existing in schools: schoolwide, settingwide, classroom, and individual (Wunder & Lindsey, 1999).
- ✧ Positive behavioral support reduces the effectiveness of inappropriate behavior and makes desired behavior more functional (Sugai & Horner, 1998).

Traditional behavior management focused on eliminating the undesired behavior with punishment. Ruef (1998) likens this to "treating the symptom and ignoring the disease."

Utilizing Positive Behavioral Support

The foundation of any positive behavioral support plan is a functional assessment of the challenging behavior. When a student demonstrates inappropriate behavior, the following steps can help teachers and staff begin the process of understanding the purpose of the behavior (Wunder & Lindsey, 1997).

Behavior Management vs Positive Behavioral Support

	Behavior Management	*Positive Behavioral Support*
What is the problem?	The student	Systems and setting may not be appropriate Lack of skills Lack of knowledge about inappropriate behavior
What needs to be changed?	The student	One of the systems may need to be adjusted Some settings may need to be adapted Skills may need to be taught
Who's responsible?	The student	Teachers, administrators, parents, and the student share responsibility
What is the goal?	Stop the undesired behavior	Understand the purpose of the behavior, so the student can replace it with new appropriate behavior or skills
How do we accomplish the goal?	Punish the student	Use positive approaches to reinforce appropriate behavior
How long is this going to take?	This takes days or weeks to eliminate one behavior for one student	This can take years to create effective systems But, once in place, this proactive approach prevents many problems
Who does this?	An authority figure or someone specializing in behavior management, implementing in one setting	A collaborative team, implementing across different settings
Does it work?	May stop undesired behavior in one setting A more intense inappropriate behavior may replace the behavior	Replaces undesired behavior with new behavior or set of skills Generalizes to all settings

1. **Formulate a collaborative team.** This team consists of people who have a genuine interest in the student. A student's IEP team, the building level support team or grade level team, and parents can fill this role.
2. **Define the behavior.** Describe the behavior exactly in observable, specific, and nonjudgmental terms.
3. **Identify the circumstances**. Where does this occur? Where does it not occur?
4. **Determine the probable function.** What happens before the behavior? What happens after? What is the student getting from this behavior? What is the student avoiding because of this behavior?
5. **Develop a hypothesis**. What is the "best guess" about why the behavior is occurring at this particular time in this particular place?

Once we view inappropriate behaviors in the context of what purpose they are serving the student, we can decide on an appropriate intervention.

Research suggests the following proactive and teacher recommended strategies. These can be implemented as part of an individual behavioral improvement plan or informally for the whole class.

Change the Environment

The room arrangement should provide adequate space between quiet and active work areas. Be aware of the flow of traffic. Too much space can encourage some students to run. Too little space can lead to bumping (Ruef, 1998). Consider the following changes to accommodate the needs of individual students:

1. Provide a study carrel for students who are highly distracted by classroom noises.

"When prevention becomes the goal, as it should, the focus of intervention planning changes from what we might do to the child to what we might change about our own classroom practices."

Strain & Hemmeter, 1997

2. Clearly define each student's space, activity, and learning centers. Students can progress through these at a predictable schedule.
3. Seat students preferentially. Students with vision or hearing difficulties need seating in the front of the class. Some with distracting behaviors do better if seated away from the center of the class.
4. Provide earphones for noise-sensitive students to wear during noisy times.
5. Be aware of all components of the environment; some students may be sensitive to sounds, smells, textures, and colors.

Increase Predictability

"A classroom schedule that is well-designed and implemented consistently may be the single most important factor in preventing challenging behaviors" (Strain & Hemmeter, 1997). A predictable classroom is a secure classroom for many students. Consider these proactive strategies to provide predictability:

- ✧ **Implement a daily schedule.** Younger students can learn the routine of each day. Older students find a weekly planner helpful. When students know what to do and when to do it, many behavior problems are avoided (Ruef, 1998).
- ✧ **Teach transition behavior.** Predictable changes in elementary classroom routines may require movement to another area in the school, the gathering of materials, and listening for directions. Teach expected behavior to minimize student uncertainty about where to go, what to bring, and how to get there. Upper grade level students should be aware of dismissal preferences of the teacher and expected student conduct in the hallway.
- ✧ **Routinize the unexpected.** Fire, tornado, and disaster drills are the big unexpected events in the school day. Teaching the students how to line up, the appropriate noise level, and the speed of exit will help them manage the unexpected. Take time at the beginning of the school year to develop substitute teacher plans. Teach the students their roles and responsibilities when a substitute teacher is with the class.

Implement more Choices

Providing choices demonstrates influence without disruption to students with challenging behaviors. This does not mean that students can do whatever they wish, but they can make a choice from a prepared list (Ruef, 1998). Carr et al. (1994) suggests the following checklist to help teachers empower students to make appropriate choices:

1. Assess choice-making skills.
2. Identify the types and extent of choices available.
3. Provide opportunities for choice whenever appropriate.
4. Create options related to the functions of the inappropriate behavior. For example, if the student is trying to get away from an assignment, provide several assignments from which to choose.

5. Give the student choices and honor that choice.
6. If the student makes a choice not offered, honor the choice unless it would disrupt or prevent the student from meeting goals.
7. If the student fails to make a choice, provide natural consequences (you make the choice).
8. Embed choice into an activity or assignment.

Adapt the Curriculum

Research has shown that assignments which students could connect to their home or community, reflected their interests, and were age-appropriate were associated with positive student behavior (Ferro et al., 1996).

Ruef (1998) suggests teachers consider these four elements when designing instruction:

1. Have I taken advantage of the students' interests and preferences?
2. Am I utilizing different modalities (visual, auditory, and tactile) when I present this information?
3. Is the task too long or too short? Is the level of difficulty appropriate for my students?
4. Have I adjusted my method of presentation and monitoring to meet the needs of my students?

Provide More Support

Students with challenging behavior may need more support with academic or social tasks. This additional support can be from the teacher, paraprofessional, or peers. Peer support depends on the individual students involved and may not be successful in every instance. Ruef (1998) outlines two types of peer support:

1. **Peer tutoring.** The instruction of one student by another student has been shown to be effective with practice of skills, monitoring of learning, and reinforcement of teacher-directed instruction.

For more information about functional behavioral assessment and positive behavior support, see Innovations for November 1997 & 1999.

2. **PALS** *(Pair, Arrange, Limit, Structure).* This approach has been utilized successfully with younger students in the reinforcement of social skills. This type of peer support structures the environment.
   - ✧*Pair*: typical learners are paired in activities with other students who may need additional practice.
   - ✧*Arrange*: adults reduce their rate of interaction during the activity.
   - ✧*Limit*: the number and variety of materials available are limited during the activity.
   - ✧*Structure*: the students work toward a cooperative goal and understand their role in achievement of the goal.

Utilize Positive Reinforcement

Most students will follow the rules of the school and the classroom without incident. Some students with challenging behavior don't have the skills, either social, behavioral, or academic, to find school activities rewarding. A few students will require a structured reinforcement system, which utilizes extrinsic rewards for appropriate behavior and work completion.

Teachers can make the climate of their classroom more positive by appreciating appropriate behavior with praise, positive comments, and sincere affection for all students.

Positive behavioral support is a comprehensive, research-based, and proactive approach which can produce comprehensive change for students with challenging behaviors (Ruef, 1998).

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